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ENGINEERS' SOCIETY OF
WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

"Our Society"—Its Purpose
and Its Possibilities

A TOAST



"OUR SOCIETY"

Response to a Toast at
The Annual Banquet of the

ENGINEERS' SOCIETY OF WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

Hotel Schenley, Pittsburg
Friday, February 21, 1902

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OUR SOCIETY.



ENTLEMEN:—Our Engineers' Society of Western Pennsylvania celebrates its annual festivities on the eve of Washington's birthday—Washington, the young engineer, who found at the confluence of our rivers a strategic point for future supremacy. At this season our Society begins a new year—its affairs are entrusted to the guidance of new officers. This banquet is truly a birthday party, for an application for a charter for the Society was presented to Judge E. H. Stowe, February 21, 1880, 22 years ago to-

day. At that time, as a gentleman remarked to me this evening, there were very few engineers in Pittsburg, and the enlarged influence of the engineer has been one of the notable features of the last few years. The charter named several classes of engineers who would compose the Society, but did not include a class which is typified in one of the emblems by which Miss Pittsburg has been surrounded by the artist who designed the little books before us. For in modest position behind the folds of her golden gown—possibly toward the east to typify East Pittsburg—there stands a dynamo. In those early days the electricians did not count, but during four years past and another to come, two secretaries are taken from the ranks of electrical engineers, and during a year

past and a year to come the two presidents are electrical engineers.

Our Society grew. Its membership was 249 in 1882, and increased with fair uniformity from year to year, until in 1894 it reached 448. It then fell off to 360 in 1899. It rose to 410 last year, and to 480 in January of this year. It is now 500.

There is probably no other local engineering society which is so favorably situated as ours. It is in Western Pennsylvania, in Pittsburg, in the region and in the city which above all others are pre-eminent in their engineering works, in the country which is assuming the industrial supremacy of the world.

Various elements have contributed to the greatness of Pittsburg. The three radiating rivers, the underlying beds of latent heat and power,

armies of laborers and of skilled workmen and their capable managers. But besides the facilities and the materials and the forces which nature supplies, and besides the active workmen and managers and capitalists is the man who determines *how*—how to apply forces and to use materials. It is the man who finds out how, who plans how, who directs how, that has been and ever will be one of the first factors in the progress that Pittsburg makes—and that man, gentlemen, is the *Engineer*.

In and about Pittsburg there are engineers whose work has made our city pre-eminent in a score of industries, there are men who are now directing operations involving tens of thousands of men and millions upon millions of capital—not merely the men who are leaders, high in ability

and experience and position, but the *many*, prepared in technical schools or the school of experience who are doing technical and engineering work in laboratory and office and workshop. These constitute the brain which guides the brawn. What is more fitting than that so many engineers representing so many active industries and branches of engineering and located within an hour's radius of the city's center should be united by an organization, strong and active?

Such an organization may well become the exponent of the engineering work of Western Pennsylvania. Such an organization should constitute a "community of interest" among progressive and effective men engaged in the diverse branches of engineering. Such an organization

should be the means of initiating and promoting in a broad and generous way those measures which advance the interests and efficiency of the engineering profession, and on the other hand, measures by which the engineering profession may promote the general interest and welfare.

But in addition to its broader possibilities are the advantages which come to the individual members of such a society through mutual acquaintance and intercourse. In each branch of engineering, fellow workers may be mutually helpful in their special kinds of work, but engineers who are specialists are in danger of being restricted both in knowledge and in sympathy within narrow limits. The bridge designer, the chemist, the engine expert, the glass mak-

er, and the telephone engineer may not have much in common. But, although they may not be able to follow one another very far into technical details, yet there can be appreciation of the importance of the varieties of engineering work and of the methods which each employs and the results which are secured.

A member of our Society once told us the story of the successive difficulties he had encountered and how he had overcome them in developing a percussion tool, to be operated by compressed air. The various details of valve construction and inertia troubles remain in my mind only as a general impression, but I do remember the story of long-continued, painstaking, patient work, in which theory and test alternated in guiding progress, and also the clear,

concise and interesting way in which the story was told.

A novel idea often tempts one to invent and develop, especially if it be outside of one's own sphere, as all seems so simple and easy. I do not know what disappointment might have been my lot, but now no brilliant inspiration on percussion tools can allure me in hope of speedy success into a series of troubles which might never end, for I gained a profound respect for my friend's little air hammer.

Aside from its technical feature, an engineers' society should broaden and develop and inspire its members—it should be dominated by the spirit of brotherhood and helpfulness.

Two years ago in this room the gentleman who is now second vice-

president of the Society entered a plea for the young engineer of Pittsburgh. I urge the same plea. Hundreds of young men leave their homes and come to this city every year, enlisting in its engineering service. Some fall among congenial and helpful associates, others do not. Some have a technical education, others have not. In addition to these there are many men of Pittsburgh working their way upward by the lessons of experience. In general they are earnest, ambitious and responsive to surrounding influences. These are the men who may shape Pittsburgh's future. The Engineers' Society should be headquarters for such men. Its library and reading room and its parlors should be their rendezvous. In its regular meetings and its social op-

portunities they may meet one another and they may come in contact with older men, learning from their experience and profiting by their presence and acquaintance.

Who of us has not felt the inspiration which comes from the presence of those whose ability or work or character we admire? We need contact with men as well as with things. Intercourse with earnest, enthusiastic and able men makes better and more efficient engineers, broader and more effective men. I am sure there are many in common with me who have found the best thing in our Society to be the acquaintances and the friendships which have come through membership.

Our Society at present bears a creditable record, it has honored

names on its roll, it has had earnest and substantial men as leaders, but yet it falls far short of that larger activity and influence which is possible for a Society of Engineers in Pittsburg.

A society house is essential to our fullest usefulness, and certainly it would be quite appropriate that wealth to which Pittsburg engineering has contributed so much should in turn be applied to its Engineers' Society. The Society does not ask charity, nor should means for such a purpose come as an ordinary gift. Here is an opportunity for the well-to-do to make an investment which will bring rich returns to Pittsburg and Western Pennsylvania through the increased efficiency which it will give to its engineering forces.

But buildings and facilities would

not constitute a society. They help, but the real thing is the men, their ability and character, their energy and spirit. Fellow members, it is for us to use well what we have, to broaden our ideas, to outline plans for realizing the results which our Society should achieve, and with renewed energy proceed to carry them out. Let us add to our membership, partly because the Society wants good men, but more because good men need the Society.

Only yesterday I was talking with a gentleman in the city and suggested that he join the Society. He said; "I do not see that I could do the Society any good," and I replied; "I do not suppose you could, but the Society might do you a good deal of good."

This notable banquet, with three

hundred at its table, represents our “annual” members; let us have more “monthly” members, who will attend the regular meetings, contribute to the programs, take part in the discussions and serve efficiently on committees. Let each do his share, large or small, with earnestness and enthusiasm to promote the dignity and success of the Society. Let us build up a society which engineers cannot afford to stay away from, and which it will be considered an honor and a privilege to assist, which will be a pillar to the engineering profession for maintaining the prominence of Pittsburgh, and which will realize to the full the possibilities of an *Engineers' Society of Western Pennsylvania*.

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